

# THOROUGHBREDS; A STORY OF THE TURF.

By W. A. FRASER.

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## CHAPTER XI.

Shandy's escape with Diabolo had brought a new trouble to Mike Gaynor.

The boy had been discharged with a severe reprimand from Mr. Porter, and a punishment mark of disapproval from the trainer's book. He had been discharged from Ringwood inwardly swearing vengeance upon everybody connected with that place; against Diabolo he was particularly violent.

Mike tried to secure a boy in the Brookfield neighborhood to ride Diabolo in his work, but Shandy's evil tongue wagged so naturally about the horse's bad temper that no lad could be found to take on in the stable.

Ned Carter might have ridden Diabolo to work, but the big black was indeed a horse of many ideas. He had taken a notion to gallop kindly while accompanied by Lucretia and Lauzanne; worked alone he balked and was as awkward as a bronco of the plains. Also Diabolo disliked Carter, who seemed to associate his personality with that of Shandy's.

Mike's discontent over the hitch spread to John Porter. It was too bad, the horses had been doing so well.

For three days Diabolo had no gallop. On the fourth, Porter determined to ride the horse himself, he could not be beaten by an ungrateful whelp like Shandy. In his day he had been a famous gentleman jockey, and still was light enough to mount him.

"I don't like the idea, sir, it's not good enough," protested Mike.

But his master was obdurate. If Alis rode Lauzanne, why shouldn't he ride Diabolo? Gaynor would have ridden Diabolo himself rather than have his master do so, but he had a bad leg. Once upon a time it had been crushed against the rail. Somebody must ride Diabolo, the horse, naturally high-strung, was becoming wild with nervousness through being knocked out of his work.

During the time Shandy had been in the Porter stable, he had received money from Lauzanne for keeping the latter posted as to the work and condition of the Derby colts, Lucretia.

For three days after his discharge he sat brooding, with the low cunning of a forest animal, over his supposed ill-treatment.

"God drat 'em!" he murmured. "I'll get even, or know why. They'll put Ned on Diabolo, will they? The sneak! He'll split on me for being the black. I know; even him. They ain't got another boy, but then they won't fix that stuff, Carter, but then they won't have no boy."

He drank beer, and as it irritated his ferret mind, a devilish plot came into his being and took possession of him, a plot of execution because of his familiarity with the Ringwood stables.

That night he slipped through the dark, like a hyena on its prey.

The stable was locked, mattered not. Many times, when through laziness, Shandy had not gone to Mike's quarters for the keys, he had found ingress by a small window of four square through which the soiled straw bedding was thrown into the yard.

Sitting on the dung heap, Shandy worked open the board latch that closed this window, and wormed his way out through the small opening. He passed down the passage between the stall and entered a saddle room at the further end.

The bloomin' thing used to be on the fourth peg," he muttered, drawing his small figure up on tiptoe and feeling along the wall for something. "Bless me!" he exclaimed suddenly as his fingers encountered the cold steel of a key. "I'd know that snaffle in hell, if I got a feel of it."

There was a patent device of a taxi and a loose ring in the centre of the bit he clutched, which Porter had devised for Diabolo's hard mouth.

Shandy gave the bridle a swing, and it clattered to the floor from his peg. Diabolo snorted and pawed the planks of his stall nervously.

"All right, my buck," hissed Shandy. You wait till to-morrow; git the run of yer life, I'm thinkin'—damn their eyes! and he went off into a perfect torrent of imprecation against everybody at Ringwood—his master.

Then he shut the door of the saddle room behind him, sat down on the floor, pulled from his pocket a knife and a stub of a candle. He lighted the latter and held it flame down till a few drops of tallow formed a tiny lake; in this he stuck the candle upright, shielding its flame with his coat. He opened the knife, and laying it down, inspected minutely the bridle, which lay across his leg.

"It's Diabolo's right enough," he said. "I couldn't be mistook on the bit, nor them snig lines."

He picked up the knife, and holding the little rein across the palm of his left hand, started to saw it gently with the blade. Almost instantly he left off. "Of all the bloomin' jinks! God drat me for a goat! He'd feel that cut the first slip through the fingers."

He gathered in the rein until he cut it six inches from the bit. There he cut; stopping many times and doubling the leather close to the candle light, to see how deep he had penetrated.

"There, Mr. Bloody Ned!" he exclaimed at last, as inspection showed that only the outer hard shell of the leather remained uncut. "That'll hold till the black takes one of his cranky spells, and you give him a stiff pull. God help you then."

Even this was a blasphemous cry of exultation, not a plea for divine assistance for the man he plotted against.

His next move proved that his cunning was of an exceptional order. From his coat pocket he brought forth a pill box. In this receptacle Shandy dipped a forefinger and rubbed into the fresh cut of the leather a trifle of blackened axle-grease, which he had taken from a wagon wheel before starting out. Then he wiped the rein with his coat tail and looked at it admiringly.

"It's bloke won't see that, blast him!" he thought. He hung the bridle up in its place, put out the candle, dropped it in his pocket and made his way from the stable.

As he passed Diabolo's stall the big black snorted again, and plunged in fright.

"You'll get enough of that to-morrow," sneered the boy. "I hope you and Ned will break your damn necks. For two weeks I'd drop something in your feed box 'till you settle you right; now, but it's the snig has split on me I want to get even with."

Shandy trudged back to his boarding

house in Brookfield and went to bed. In the first ray of his early morning he arose and went out to the racetrack.

The racetrack near Ringwood had formerly been a trotting park; in fact, it was still used at irregular intervals for the harness horses. At its primitive days a small, square, box-like structure had done duty as a judges' stand. With other improvements a new stand had been erected a hundred yards higher up the stretch.

It was to the little old stand that Shandy took his way. Inside he waited for the coming of Gaynor's string of gallopers.

He was as supremely happy in his unrighteous work as any evil-minded boy might be at the prospect of unlimited mischief.

"Ned'll ride Diabolo, sure—there's nothing else to it," he muttered. "I hope he'll be blasted neck. I'll pay 'em out for turnin' me off like a dog," he continued, savagely, the small ferret eyes blazing with fury. "I'll learn 'em the damn—Hello!" His sharp ears had caught the muffled sound of hoofs thudding the turf in a slow, measured walk. He peeped between the shrunken boards.

"Yes, it's Mike. And the girl, too—blast her! She blamed me for near bein' eaten alive by that black devil of a dope horse. Hello!"

This ambiguous exclamation was occasioned by the sight of his former master springing into the saddle on Diabolo's back. "What the game, eh? God strike me dead! I've been waitin' for you. My arms ache with bein' near pulled out of the sockets by that leather-mouthed brute. Gif the boss hasn't got spurs on—say, boys, there'll be a merry hell to pay, and no pitchfork!"

The young Arab spoke to the boards as though they were partners in his inquiry. Then he clucked diabolically, as in fancy he saw Porter being trampled by the horse.

"The girls on Lauzanne!" he muttered. "She's the best in the lot, if she did run me down. A ridin' that old crook, too, when she ought to be in the house washing dishes. A woman ain't got no more business about the stable than a man's got in the kitchen. Petricca's the devil. I never could abide 'em."

Shandy sometimes backed to his early English Whitechapel, for he had come from the old country and had brought with him all the depravity he could acquire in the first five years of his existence there.

"Ned's got the soft snap in that blasted punch," as his eyes discovered Carter on Lauzanne. "He's slipped me this; but I've nabbed the boss, so I don't care. I'm next then this trip, and as the three horses and their riders, came on to the course he pulled out a silver spilt-second stopwatch for his timing, and started and stopped several times.

"You'll pay for their feed, you damn ole skin-flick!" he was apostrophizing Porter. "An' I'll be next the best they can do, an' an' an' on the rake-off. Gee! I thought they was out for a trial, he muttered, looking disconsolately at the three as they entered the part of the journey.

"I'll catch 'em at the half, on the off chance," he added.

But though the timepiece in his hand clucked impatiently, after he pressed the stem with his thumb, as Diabolo's black nose showed past the half-mile post, the three horses still came.

Lauzanne was loitering leisurely with the action of a wooden rocking-horse. Lucretia, her long, in-tipped ears cocked eagerly forward, was throwing her head impatiently into the air, as though pleading for just one strong gallop. Diabolo's neck was arched like the half of a Cupid's bow, his head, almost against his chest, hung heavy in the reins tight-drawn in Porter's strong hands. His eyes, showing full of a suspicious whiteness, stood out from his lean, bony face; they were possessed of a peculiar impatient look. Froth flicked back from the nervous, quivering lips, and spat against his black satin-skinned chest, where it hung like seafoam on holding sand.

"Whoa! Steady, old boy!" Porter was coaxing soothingly. "Steady, boy!"

"The ease up has put the very venom into this fellow," he flung over his shoulder to Alis, who sat at Diabolo's quarter. "He's a hard-mouthed brute, if ever there was one."

"He'll be all right, dad," she called forward, raising her voice, for the wind cut her. "Shandy rode him with a heavy hand, that's why."

"I'll put a rubber bit—in his mouth—to soften it," he pumped, brokenly. "Let out a rap—girl—and we'll breeze them up to the front—with the mare."

A quarter of a mile from the finish the horses raced into a swinging stride. Diabolo was simply mad with a desire to gallop, but in the saddle was his master; no horse ever did as he wished with John Porter. Battling against the sharp, leaping horse, might have hand him out of the strife, but in the saddle, the elation of movement kept him in his sinews, and he was superbly a king. As a jockey, he would have been unsurpassed. It filled his heart with delight to play with the fierce, impetuous animal he rode.

"Steady, my boy—no, you don't!" Like a Diabolo stuck his neck straight out like an arrow and sought to hold the bit tight at his own sweet will. Back came the right hand, then the left; three vicious saws, drawn down again close to the martingale; Lucretia and Lauzanne were pulling to the front.

"Go on!" called Porter to Ned Carter. "Take him out at the three-quarter gallop down the back stretch. I'll be treading your heels off."

By a time they were opposite the old stand where hid Shandy. The boy, surmising that a gallop was on, and anxious to see them as they rounded the turn going down the back, had knocked a board loose to witness the crack. As the horses came abreast, Shandy, leaning forward in his eagerness, dislodged it at the top, and it fell with a clatter, striking the wind with a fair across the little stand, so the scent of the boy came to Diabolo's nostrils at the same instant the startling noise reached his ears. In a nerve he almost stopped, every muscle of his body trembling in fright.

Porter was nearly thrown from his seat by the sudden stop. He saw the horse seemed to shrink from under him. Just for an instant, but the reins had flapped loose against the wet neck and Diabolo felt it.

With a snort he plunged forward like a wounded buck, and raced madly after

Lucretia, who had bolted when the crash came.

Porter had lost a stirrup in the sudden twist, and the reins had slipped through his fingers as he grabbed the mane on Diabolo's saddle, to pull his weight back into the strafe.

Now the black neck was straight and taut, flat-capped by the slim ears that lay close to the throatlatch. The thunder of his pounding hoofs reached to the ears of Lucretia and Lauzanne in front, and urged them onward.

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"Curse the brute," gasped Porter, burying his knees in the saddle flaps, and searching for the dangling stirrup with the toe of his right foot. Once he almost had it, but missed, the iron, swinging viciously, caught Diabolo in the flank—it made little difference, his terror was complete.

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As well might he have pulled at the rock of Gibraltar. Diabolo's head was up, his teeth set hard, and the man's strength, as was nothing against the full-muscled neck of the horse, was as nothing against the lead the other two held over him, galloping like a demon. Porter felt that he must loosen the bit and throw that set head down to a snaffle, and use the one rein meant a crash into the rail, and surely dead. Before he had thought only of the horse's welfare, now it was a matter of life and death.

"Go on!" he shouted to them in front; "go on, and give me a lead. Hang to the reins!"

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"I'll hold him, it's as good as an ambulance."

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Now the black neck was straight and taut, flat-capped by the slim ears that lay close to the throatlatch. The thunder of his pounding hoofs reached to the ears of Lucretia and Lauzanne in front, and urged them onward.

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"Curse the brute," gasped Porter, burying his knees in the saddle flaps, and searching for the dangling stirrup with the toe of his right foot. Once he almost had it, but missed, the iron, swinging viciously, caught Diabolo in the flank—it made little difference, his terror was complete.

All the time Porter was knocking the dangling reins back through forefinger and thumb, shortening his hold for a strong pull that galloping mare would not resist.

"Who-o-o-a-h, who-o-o-a-h, steady-y-y," and bracing himself against the pommel, he swung the weight of his shoulders on the reins.

As well might he have pulled at the rock of Gibraltar. Diabolo's head was up, his teeth set hard, and the man's strength, as was nothing against the full-muscled neck of the horse, was as nothing against the lead the other two held over him, galloping like a demon. Porter felt that he must loosen the bit and throw that set head down to a snaffle, and use the one rein meant a crash into the rail, and surely dead. Before he had thought only of the horse's welfare, now it was a matter of life